

**DECISION NOTICE:
PLACID LAKE STATE PARK CAMPGROUND
IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
(406) 542-5500

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to install (13) campsite electrical pedestals within the southwest campground loop at Placid Lake State Park. This project will improve (13) of the (40) existing campsites or 32% of the available campsites within the park. Furthermore, improvements to the electrical infrastructure of this campground loop will accommodate the installation of a restroom courtesy light at the public bathroom within the loop.

Montana Environmental Policy Act

The Montana Environmental Policy Act requires Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on July 10, 2009.

Public Process and Comment

The EA was sent out and the public comment period began July 10, 2009, and ran through August 10, 2009. Legal notices were published in the Missoulian, the Helena Independent Record and the Seeley Swan Pathfinder. There were 10 full copies, 6 electronic versions, and 176 post card notes about the EA sent to interested parties consisting of neighbors, friends, conservation groups, Montana state legislators, county & state departments or agencies, and federal agencies. Also, there was a statewide press release and a posting on the FWP website. The EA is still available for review at http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice_1061.aspx.

Alternative A: No Action

If FWP chooses not to upgrade a portion of the existing campsites with electrical pedestals, visitors and campers that desire to utilize electricity will continue to inquire about them when they visit the campground and may choose to utilize noisy generators in lieu of electrical pedestals.

Alternative B: Electrification of the Southeastern Campground Loop (13 campsites) – Preferred Action

The proposed enhancement to the campground at Placid Lake State Park with the electrification of 13 campsites would provide an additional service for camper comforts (e.g., medical equipment, kitchen appliances, TV, air conditioning, heaters, etc.). Install a courtesy light for the latrine in this loop.

Additionally, the electrification of these campsite loops could potentially lessen some of the pressure for lake-view campsites by visitors with RVs and 5th-wheel campers to otherwise underutilized campsites in the park making these more “prime” campsites available to tent campers or those visitors who have hard-sided camping units without electrical provisions.

Furthermore, the new outlets will reduce the need for visitors to rely on noisy generators to power campers and recharge boating equipment.

Summary of Public Comment

A total of 28 responses were received regarding this proposal. There were 8 post cards directly received from the public recreating at the park, 15 e-mails received at the R-2 headquarters, and 5 comments received by phone, mail or in person. The proposed development within Placid Lake State Park consisted of electrifying 13 campsites, and installing a courtesy light at one of the latrines within the campground.

A.) Comments in support of electrifying 13 campsites. For electrifying campsites, 14 of the 28 responses were in favor of the proposal. The most frequently mentioned positive outcomes of the installation of electrical service at a limited number of sites included: reducing generator use, thus creating a “quieter, natural experience”; a needed improvement for tourism and traveler’s to Montana; and, health benefits from the ability to run medical equipment.

Excerpts from comments received for Placid Lake State Park:

“Electricity is less polluting, quieter, and safer than using generators. Out state parks should be for all citizens, not just those who don’t want electricity. I don’t see it as being in competition with private campgrounds but as an in-between accommodation, with commercial campgrounds also offering on site water and sewer.”

“ ‘a quiet campground’? Ha! Unless it’s off road there is no such thing. There is no camping experience worse than being next to a generator, usually a loud one because they’re cheapest.”

“I believe electricity would be of benefit not only to those with RV’s but to those who say they want a quieter, natural like experience. I think if electricity was available there would virtually no noise from generators.”

“From a tourism perspective this is an important and much needed improvement to our State Parks. Travel and tourism has changes immensely over just the last ten years. Although people are coming to Montana in order to get away, the largest demographic of travel, and the group that will only continue to grow and dominate the tourism industry, are baby boomers. They are a demographic that enjoys adventure and getting away from their busy lives, but also have expectations of a level of service no matter where they go. It is the beginning of the generations that are connected no matter where they are in the world, through cell phones and computers. Their idea of getting away has changed from tent camping to a fully equipped travel trailer. They want the amenities of home, away from home and because of this, electricity in campgrounds is an expectation. State Parks is an integral partner in Montana’s tourism industry – an industry that is being hit hard by our current economic crisis. The two complaints that we hear in the visitor center from tourists about our State Parks are no electricity and no reservation system. The addition of electrical pedestals at these State Parks will go a long way in the right direction toward alleviating one of these issues.”

“Yes, yes, yes, We love it here! Our 5th wheel is new and has all the fancy gadgets for electricity. We need to upgrade all the parks.”

“Vote for electrical hookup.”

“We look forward to the electricity and graveling by the fire-pits. Thanks for Montana Parks.”

“More electrical hookups.”

“Support electrical improvements to Salmon, Placid and Beavertail Hill State Parks”

“Yes, to electrical improvements to all three parks. Many of today’s campers are set up to have electric hook-ups.”

“RV camping seems to be popular here so hookups seem like a good idea. Charge a little more and make your money back. Personally I’m a tent camper and these improvements wouldn’t affect me. I would like to see another water supply put in the upper loop sites in the #30’s. Overall nice campground we have enjoyed ourselves.”

FWP Response: *So noted for above supportive comments.*

“Yes, I am in favor of having electric hook-up in the lower loop, 13 sites.”

“Yes, I am in favor of electricity at Placid. It needs to be in either the lower loop or the middle because that is where most of the big RVs camp. It is also the most used.”

FWP Response: *The upper loop is being considered because it is the least utilized loop in the campground. By electrifying this loop, FWP feels that camping revenues will actually increase. This will also leave the other two loops more available for those who would not want electricity.*

“We think the money should be spent on putting more water spigots around camp. Either way is fine.”

FWP Response: *FWP will look into the need for more water spigots.*

B.) Comments in opposition to electrifying campsites. For not electrifying campsites, 14 of the 28 were opposed to the proposal. Common themes mentioned were: competition with private campgrounds, cost to taxpayers and wastefulness in current economic times, and the belief that the use or presence of electrical pedestals at campsites does not present a true camping experience.

Excerpts from comments received for Placid Lake State Park:

“Please don’t electrify our state parks”

FWP Response: *So noted.*

“If FWP wanted to put in a few electrified campsites, for some specific justification or need, maybe OK. But don’t see the reason or need. It raises the cost of the campground/camping. Twenty dollars a night is a lot of money. This puts the cost out of reach for more people. Makes

the campgrounds more like some main highway campgrounds. Takes away the spirit of camping.”

FWP Response: *The EA clearly states our reason for electrifying some campsites. Not all the campsites in Placid will be electrified, therefore, only those wanting it will pay for it.*

“I do not think Placid Lake campground should get electric hook-ups. I have camped in campgrounds with and without electrical hook-ups and I think the ones with electrical hook-ups attract a different kind of camper (meaning the person’s philosophy toward camping) and also larger rigs. I think there are enough campgrounds with electrical hook-ups for campers that really think they need them. The state and national parks and BLM land seem to be the places to camp to avoid the campgrounds with electrical hook-ups. If even the state parks get electrical hook-ups, there won’t be campgrounds without hook-ups, and it won’t be like camping anymore. I live in Seeley Lake year-round and moved here two years ago. I don’t think Placid Lake campgrounds need electric hook-ups and with the limited FWP resources available, that money could be spent better elsewhere.”

FWP Response: *Everyone’s definition of “camping” is different. Montana State Parks does not discriminate between one type of camping or another. Our 2006 visitor survey shows that already over 50% of the campers in our state parks are using motor-homes and full size hard-sided campers.*

“This is in response to the EA’s proposing electrification of campsites at West Shore, Beavertail Hill, Salmon Lake, Placid Lake, Black Sandy and Lewis & Clark Caverns State Parks prepared by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. I realize the deadline has passed for the latter two but still need to comment about those two parks. Preparing separate EA’s for each park seems counterintuitive when each EA addresses the same issues and the same actions. At first glance this would seem to be an attempt for an end run around the process which is disappointing to see come from FWP. Having read the EA’s I have several comments. Electrification of all these campsites would destroy the night skies and quiet solitude of each of these campsites. My family and I have used all these campsites over the years and light pollution and increased noise will definitely be a problem. These campgrounds are almost always full (especially Salmon and Placid Lakes) during the summer months, adding electricity will not generate more use of these campgrounds. Electrification of all these campsites runs counter to the very need to conserving energy and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and reducing our carbon footprint. From my professional experience, FWP has greater needs than spending scarce dollars on programs which may or may not return revenue to the agency. FWP, and Montana sportsmen and women, would be better suited if you would take the \$750,000 and spend it on backlogged maintenance at these parks instead. Finally, the EA’s acknowledge a lack of hard data supporting the need for such action, citing only anecdotal evidence. Anecdotal evidence does not qualify as data necessary to determine an appropriate course of action. Anecdotal evidence does not belong in any assessment of any type; your agency needs to be taken to task for relying on such inadequate documentation. If you have any questions or need clarification, please feel free to contact me. Thanks you.”

FWP Response: *We felt that it was necessary to prepare individual EA’s for each state park, especially, since each park is located in different geographic areas of the state and may have different resource issues to address. Obviously, there are many similarities to each proposal;*

however, there are also some differences that we felt were important to point out. Electrification will not lead to the night skies being lit up any more than they are now when people camp. We are NOT proposing to install streetlights, only provide electrical pedestals that a camper could plug into to run appliances, various camping equipment, or health equipment without running their generators. Electricity is one of the more energy efficient forms of electricity than the use of fossil fuels. The spending of state park dollars to provide this service to campers is meeting a need that will not only enhance tourism but also meet the emerging needs of today's "baby boomer" generation. Even comments from Missoula's Convention and Visitors Bureau indicate that the lack of electricity in our Montana State Parks is a very common complaint by tourists visiting Montana. Many anglers to our state parks rely on batteries to power their boats & fishing gear and have to run generators to charge them up. More and more of our camping public carry medical equipment needed for their health needs.

"I have received notification of improvements (electrification projects) for Beavertail Hill State Park, Placid Lake State Park, Salmon Lake State Park, Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park and Black Sandy State Park.

I am of the opinion that NONE of these projects may proceed without the approval of the Legislature. However, I was not active in the 2009 Legislature to know if you received approval in advance.

Please note that 23-1-126(4) MCA requires that "any development in state parks and fishing access sites beyond those defined as maintenance in 23-1-127 must be approved by the legislature. No where in 23-1-127 MCA is it permissible to electrify any or FAS.

Perhaps the 2009 legislature approved these projects in a bill I am unaware of. If so, please advise how I may find that action. If not, please advise how it is that your agency intends to get around this legal requirement.

Additionally, 23-1-110(2)(g) states "The department shall prepare a public report regarding any project that is subject to the provisions of subsection (1). The report must include conclusions relating to the following aspects of the proposal: (g) site-specific modifications as they relate to the park or fishing access site system as a whole." A purpose of this section of law is to insure that maintenance is up-to-date before additional development takes place. You have a noxious weed and/or noxious plant (Salt Cedar and Russian Olive) problem all across the park/FAS system and yet you are developing sites before this maintenance is addressed. Many sites need improved toilet facilities and improved toilet and trash maintenance. So, how does additional development at this time comply with the intent of the law?

When and where are the public meetings on the developments as provided for in 23-1-110?

Referenced statutes are copied below.

Please observe that I have copied this inquiry to the Attorney General, Governor, Hal Harper, FWP Commission members and others."

"No need for me to go beyond the above mentioned comments, which exactly echo my thoughts AGAINST the plan to electrify 5 Montana State Parks. We have worked for too many years, through too many fads, to not realize that this plan significantly increases the maintenance costs for state parks, destroys the natural setting, and caters to a dwindling, resource-consuming sector of the so-called "camping" populace. For all the reasons enunciated, I will go on record OPPOSING these five projects so that I can join in the inevitable appeal before the FWP Commission. Thank you for your time and consideration."

FWP Response: *After consulting with our legal bureau, and reviewing the analysis of the Legislative Services Division, the Department has in fact received the appropriate legislative approval for this project [Sec. 23-1-126(4)]. The Department adheres strictly to the Legislative process of getting authorization for capital improvements.*

Draft environmental assessments (EA) represent the public involvement and reporting requirement specified in statute. The opportunity for public meetings was also presented and discussed in each EA. These EA's are the established forum for public comments for proposed projects. All public comments received are evaluated and considered.

Finally, should an individual be dissatisfied with the decision reached by the Department following the public comment period, the decision may be appealed to the Department Director and ultimately to the FWP Commission.

"I understand there is a proposal to "improve" the Placid Lake campground by installing electrical pedestals in 13 of the campsites. I oppose the installation of the electrical pedestals because I do not believe it's in the best interest of ALL campers; only those willing and able to pay the increased price for the campsites with electricity. Next they'll want to put in septic services. Where does it end? I see the need for electricity in the handicapped sites but I don't see the need for it in the rest of the campsites. We've been camping at Placid Lake Campground for the last twenty-five years and the improvements made so far are adequate for camping and day use. If campers would like all of the amenities of a resort, they should go to a resort. Thank you for allowing me my say in this matter."

"I am giving my comment on the electricity at Placid Lake campground. I have been going to that campground for over 25 years and see no need for electricity on any more spots. There are already spots for handy cap with power and only one of them was used the two weeks I was just there. I was there from July 29th until August 7th. I think you have improved the grounds enough over the past 20 years. So I say leave them the way they are and let us campers use what is there. If I wanted to go to a KOA I would stay in town. I come to Placid because it is beautiful just the way it is. If people want power they have generators. That is even more modern than you need for camping. Thank you for letting us help with the decision. Happy the way it is Placid Lake Camper Vicki."

"While I agree that electrified campsites make it possible for some folks who require power for medical equipment to enjoy camping, and that's a good thing, I can't agree that electrified campsites are a good thing for able bodied campers. A cell phone can run for days without a charge, and they can be charged from car batteries anyway. This is camping, experiencing the outdoors, the solitude, the family around the campfire. To enable folks to sit in their motorhomes watching TV and videos is NOT a good thing, and should not be touted as a valued addition to camping in Montana.

Rechargeable boating equipment?? What the heck is that? Certainly not an essential component for boating.

I don't support this idea. I think it panders to wrong instincts about what camping should be, and it's a slippery slope to start walking on. Next thing you know, we'll be trucking in sand every year, so that walking near the lake won't be so hard on tender feet.

If you want to increase the quality of the Placid Lake experience, let's see some serious restrictions on the use of jet-skis and loud boats. Why should those folks enjoy a generator-noise-

free campsite while all the rest of us have to listen to the noise they're making on the water? What's wrong with Placid Lake today isn't a lack of electric hookups at the campground, it's that there's nothing Placid about it anymore during the summer months.”

FWP Response: *Everyone’s definition of “camping” is different. Montana State Parks does not discriminate between one type of camping or another. Our 2006 visitor survey shows that already over 50% of the campers in our state parks are using motor-homes and full size hard-sided campers.*

Many anglers to our state parks rely on batteries to power their boats & fishing gear (fish finders, electric trolling motors) and have to run generators to charge them up once they are off the water for the day.

There are about 150 cabin owners around Placid Lake. During the day there is a lot of noise that occurs, not only from potentially 40 campers on the weekends but the private cabin owners, most who have boats or water toys of some sort. FWP is focusing on the noise that often occurs during the night “quiet hours” when many campers are utilizing generators.

“Want to go on public record that I am opposed to electricity at Placid, Salmon, and Beavertail Hill. It is a waste of taxpayer’s money. Would suggest a more productive use of the money by cleaning out the trash fish in Placid, plant with Tiger Muskie”

FWP Response: *This project reflects the changing needs and values of state park visitors. Every recreational vehicle sold today has provision for electrical connections. Montana State Parks does not discriminate between one type of camping or another. Our 2006 visitor survey shows that already over 50% of the campers in our state parks are using motor-homes and full size hard-sided campers. Funds used for these projects are park user fees, not general fund tax dollars. FWP’s philosophy is to manage fisheries resources for native species, not introduced species.*

“Adding electricity and other RV based projects is not a good use of FWP funds! The current economy (and future gas prices?) will probably mean the dying out of these “camping” dinosaurs. Please do not cater to RVs at Placid Lake State park.”

“I am writing to oppose any proposal to add electrical outlets for campers at the MT Placid Lake State Park Campground.

There are plenty of places that 'campers' who drive around in RVs and want electricity to run their air-conditioners and Direct TVs and strings of holiday lights can spend the night.

Camping is supposed to be about getting back to nature. Being surrounded by people who can't bear to be away from every form of creature comfort destroy this concept, and they are not to be encouraged in our state parks. I camp in state parks and avoid private RV parks specifically for this reason. People in RVs may think that what they're doing is camping, but it's not, and people with my perspective rely on state parks without electrical service to avoid all the negatives RVs bring with.

This also a terrible idea from an economic standpoint. Since there's no mention of metering the use of electricity, the citizens of MT will wind up essentially subsidizing its use. How ironic that

would be, paying RV users to come to natural settings so they can destroy the atmosphere of natural peace and quiet.

Moreover, providing this subsidized electricity will impact private businesses that are designed to serve this segment of 'campers' and put the state government in direct competition with them. That's not something our government should be doing. This was a terrible idea when it was first proposed over a year ago and it remains a terrible idea now. Please do not provide electrical hookups in this park."

"Greetings,

I reviewed your EA and would comment that this proposal was a bad idea when it was originally proposed and there was a public outcry against it a few years ago and it remains a bad idea today. Those of us on Placid Lake don't believe we should continually have to go through repeated public processes to oppose something that was rejected before as a bad idea. The campground at Placid Lake is already overcrowded with overflow camping slopping out into the surrounding areas around the lake and coming into the lake--a quick trip up to the Placid lake any weekend or during the week will reinforce this. Adding amenities to make the park more attractive is an unnecessary and wasteful expense that will only make a bad situation worse. In addition, when the Governor has a stated policy position of reducing energy use in state government by 20% it is unfathomable how DFWP can consider adding electricity outlets to the biggest energy users on the road--the RVs. This is totally inconsistent with any logical energy policy the state is pursuing. How can DFWP meet its stated targets for reduction with such an addition? To sum up my comments, this proposal should be dropped--forever--and never brought up again. We on Placid Lake are tired of an agency that continues to pursue a bad idea over and over again hoping for public complacency to proceed. It is a wasteful and unnecessary energy addition to the State and to the State Park System. Please stop it now."

FWP Response: *This project reflects the changing needs and values of state park visitors. Every recreational vehicle sold today has provision for electrical connections. Montana State Parks wants to attract campers that are desirous of camping in a state park setting. Placid Lake State Park has increased camping opportunities in an effort to make the park a destination site. This includes providing a range of camping experiences from full size hard-sided campers and RVs to tenters to campers with disabilities. Onsite staff and informational brochures direct travelers to the many local attractions in the vicinity in an effort to increase the number of days people stay in the area. This contributes to the local economy and helps small businesses. The added benefits of park visitors spending dollars in the local economy will be an asset that contributes positively to Montana's economy as a whole. Placid Lake should be for all the whole public to enjoy.*

Those who are camping outside the boundaries of the state park are usually there because they want the more primitive experience. Weekends when the Placid campground is not full will still find people camping along the Placid Lake road.

Everyone's definition of "camping" is different. Montana State Parks does not discriminate between one type of camping or another. Our 2006 visitor survey shows that already over 50% of the campers in our state parks are using motor-homes and full size hard-sided campers.

Although FWP may incur costs for maintenance due to the addition of electrical services, the fees generated from use of electricity are anticipated to offset this cost. Electricity is one of the more energy efficient forms of electricity than the use of fossil fuels. The spending of state park dollars to provide this service to campers is meeting a need that will not only enhance tourism but also

meet the emerging needs of today's "baby boomer" generation. Even comments from Missoula's Convention and Visitors Bureau indicate that the lack of electricity in our Montana State Parks is a very common complaint by tourists visiting Montana.

"I am opposed to the electrification and paving of any public campground. The last thing I want to see whether in a tent or RV is blacktop pavement in front of my campsite. I don't care what campground I go to in Montana, I especially don't want to see outdoor lights. You're turning real campgrounds into commercial operations. You people (FWP) have done an excellent job creating beautiful campgrounds for a reasonable price. There are much more important things we could be spending \$726,000 on. I'm also in a big disagreement with the extremely short comment period. The person responsible for this should be fired from his job. Maybe there needs to be a law against anything less than 3-weeks. You're right during the peak of summer when a lot of people are on vacation or are in the hectic process of getting ready for their summer vacation what better time and way to ram this thru. I'll call my legislator. Upon further notice I see 3 different due dates. Keep it simple. Keep all comment due dates the same."

FWP Response: *Everyone's definition of "camping" is different. Montana State Parks does not discriminate between one type of camping or another. The Placid Lake campground was paved two years ago and public feedback has been very positive. The courtesy light being proposed for the latrine in the upper camp-loop is for public safety. It will be shielded in such a way as to not impact the night skies. The comment period for this EA was 30 days (July 10, 2009 through August 10, 2009). Advertising an EA involving a state park during the summer months allows us to receive comments from the people actually using our campgrounds. All three EA's in Region 2 were advertised with the same due dates.*

Decision

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. It is my decision to implement Alternative B. Install electrical pedestals at 13 campsites and install a restroom courtesy light.

In accordance with FWP policy, this project is subject to appeal, which must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must specifically describe the basis for the appeal, explain how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and lay out how FWP may address the concerns in the appeal. The appeal should be mailed to: Mr. Joe Maurier, Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701.



10/12/2009

Lee Bastian
Regional Parks Manager

Date